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Columbia University
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Class of 1902

BACCALAUREATE SERMON

June 8, 1902

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BACCALAUREATE SERMON

PREACHED

IN THE GYMNASIUM OF

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

TO THE CLASS OF 1902

BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND FREDERICK BURGESS, D.D.

BISHOP OF LONG ISLAND

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BACCALAUREATE SERMON.

FIRST COR.: IX: 24, 25: *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we are incorruptible."*

A BACCALAUREATE sermon, so the dictionary says, should be one of advice to those who have taken their first degree in a university, and I feel honored this afternoon that the President of your great university has delivered you young men into my hand for one half hour at least that I may be your preceptor and guide.

Of course the great thing is success in life and I want to show you how to succeed; and in order to do this I want to review some of the standards of college success, that by considering them I may lead you to the true success of after life. St. Paul does not hesitate to speak with commendation of prizes, and I suppose I can do the same. They do it, he says, to obtain a corruptible prize; we an incorruptible.

I.

The first standard of college success which occurs to our mind is in athletics. I once visited the club house of one of our national universities with an under-graduate who showed me the various silver trophies taken in the past. I was surprised at the awe and admiration with which he spoke of the men who had won those prizes. Their names were yet living; indeed they were written

in bronze upon the walls of the club house ; but I presume it would have taxed the memory of the undergraduate a good deal to tell me the name of the last winner of the Greek prize, or indeed if there were any Greek prizes at all ; those names had been written in water.

Now, I am not sarcastic. This is perhaps as it should be ; certainly it is as it always has been. Away back in old Rome complaint was made that the people would not stay to see a new comedy of Terence because there was to be a contest of gladiators in the adjoining amphitheater. Men cannot help it ; to most men a prize fight, an athletic contest of any kind is the most alluring thing in the world, and while it is true, as has been said, that " full physical development and high intellectual development are, in the majority of cases, incompatible with one another," yet everything is to be encouraged which tends toward the strengthening of the body in university life. The time has long since gone by when the preacher can afford to disregard the body, the temple of the Holy Ghost, or to set some other standard as the highest—some gaunt, thin and consumptive saint as the ideal. Such times have gone by now, and we realize that the young man who is strong and healthy will be better able to fight the prurient fancies and the demons of impurity, which haunt most men at some time during their life's journey. And if the body responds quickly to the stimulus of the cold bath, then intemperance will be less apt to seize him in its degrading and damning clutches.

But when we have said all this, nevertheless, a word or two of warning can be spoken in regard to college athletics. In the first place the mercenary element should be eliminated. This has been steadily growing during the last twenty years. Now do not misunderstand me ; I do not

mean that the young contestants are mercenary, but the organization is. The college games should not be a time or place for making money; the people should be the guests of the students and then the most objectionable features of college athletics would disappear. The young collegian ought not to be obliged to serve in the gymnasium for money, no, not even for his college or his athletic association. I like the old time classic story that, when Xerxes had been told that he would have an easy task on the field of Marathon because the Peloponnesians were occupied with the Olympic games, he asked, "What prize does the victor receive?" And the answer being given that the prize was a wreath of wild olive, his nephew, who was standing by, burst out in spite of the displeasure of the monarch, "Heavens, Mardonius, what manner of men are these against whom thou hast brought us out to fight, men who contend, not for money, but for honor?" That spirit should actuate the whole field of college athletics. Away with gate money; away with money for seats; away with gambling; away with all professional methods which characterize the so-called sport of the world. Let the college be the place where young men contend, not for money but for honor.

And that will do away with the other objectionable feature, namely, cruelty. We want our young men to be plucky and courageous, but we do not want them to go into untoward danger in order to make a holiday for their friends. If the sport is dangerous, why then, the sight of it will demoralize the spectators. That is not always understood. Because I see young men go into a foot-ball match with all the courage of heroes that will not make me brave; seeing some man lift a thousand pounds will not make me strong; and yet it is the most common

popular fallacy, and students will gather not in hundreds as here, but by thousands, with banners and colors and—cigarettes and cheers to see eleven men do their athletics for them. And the result is that the courage is not to be found in the crowd, and sometimes those fine words of the Paracelsus occur to our mind as expressing the possible feelings of the young heroes who make a holiday for their friends at, perhaps, the price of years of subsequent suffering and incapacity.

Have your will, rabble ; while we fight the prize
Troup you in safety to the snug back seats ;
And leave a clear arena for the brave
About to perish for your sport.

Now, the doing away with all this mercenary element will, I say, eliminate thoughtless cruelty and too intense rivalry. It is a fair picture I seem to see when the people come as guests of the college to see the games and from the time they arrive until they go away the word money is not once mentioned, any more than my host to-morrow evening will ask me to pay for the dinner to which he has invited me. And I do not think so ill of college men, as for a moment to suppose that the eliminating of these mercenary conditions will affect college athletics in any harmful way. Above your gymnasiums and over the gateways of your athletic fields, let me suggest a motto for the shield: “Non pecuniæ sed honori.”

II.

And this pecuniary element must be eliminated also out of the intellectual side of the college life. A great change has taken place in regard to a university career. In the old time a father, who could afford the comparatively modest sum, sent his boy to college that he might browse

among the pastures and fields of literature and drink of the streams of learning which in those days crossed every college campus. The boy's career, as a general rule, was not decided upon beforehand; but, now-a-days, from the very beginning it is predestined and the consequence is that, as one strong English writer has said of Oxford, so we can say of our American colleges and universities, "they have been handed over to the specialists who have substituted for the old liberal education a multitude of technical schools for the cramming of the memory and the starving of the intellect. The old education, whatever may have been its faults and its defects, was an education nevertheless—not an apprenticeship." There is a great deal to be thought of here, and it is a question if our modern system is not killing the old ideal of scholarship. Indeed in my pessimistic moods I doubt whether it can ever be revived. The young men go to college to learn about electricity and wireless telegraphy and hydraulics and mechanics, not to learn to love the Homeric cadence as they do the rolling of the sea. The other night I listened to a young woman in a private house in the music room playing exquisitely on her violin. After she had finished I noticed she covered it over with some gauze-like material and laid it away in the case with reverent care. I asked if I might have the privilege of looking at it. It was all bruised, battered and mended. She told me the name of the German maker in the seventeenth century. I asked her how such a violin as that compared with those of the American workmanship to-day. "Oh," she said, with the courtesy which one shows to the ignorance of a child, "you cannot get that tone out of a modern violin." My host, who is a most fortunate young business man, said, with some degree of warmth: "Do you mean to say that the American manu-

facturer cannot reproduce almost that identical violin, together with its breaks, varnish and its mending." "No," she said, "it cannot be, such violins belong to the past," and she was right. So the question has occurred to me whether our modern colleges and universities can produce scholars like Charles James Fox or James Russell Lowell or J. Lewis Diman. The old atmosphere is gone. We can have specialists in Homeric study, specialists in Aryan philology but who can reproduce the men reared in the old quiet atmosphere, where the Homer and the Virgil and the mathematics had no bearing whatsoever on a future mercantile career?

Now I do not say all this to discourage you. Indeed the modern specialist is too sure of himself to be an easy man to discourage. But it is possible to carry the self-sacrifice to the specialist too far. The man who spends all his time greasing the guns down in the hold of the ship is not the one to tell about the tactics of the battle. The analyzer of the insect's wing will not necessarily know about the beauty of nature; and there is in scientific study by itself something narrowing unless it is supplemented by the study of the man,—of the humanities. The anthropologist will tell you about primitive man and his religion with all the dogmatism of the Calvinist; the anatomist will tell you about the vertebrate, but the Bible will tell you about the man. And it is the student of the Bible who says, as one has recently said, that there is "in history a force which is, so far as we know, in no sense evolutionary and the law to which it is hard to find—the force of personality and of character."

It is here that religion comes in and claims her own; and she cannot be gainsayed. Be specialists if you can or will, but do not be slaves. Read your Bible, your Shakespeare and your Homer, so that you may learn to know

much in regard to the nature of man, who is, as the Bible expresses it, "the Son of God." It is here that you have a duty to God with your intellect, and you can never perform that duty if you shut yourself up in the narrow lines of modern scientific scepticism and turn away from all that great field of human interests and from the literature which our fathers read and loved and which fitted them to believe in Jesus' Revelation of God as the Father of all mankind.

III.

Now do you not see what is the true success of life? Andrew Lang said that "the best things can not be taught. The universities give us leisure and books and companionship to learn for ourselves." So is it with this great truth which I have been trying to lead up to; it can not be taught; you must learn it for yourselves. But oh, there is nothing which offends me so much as the way in which that word "success" has come to be specialized in our American vocabulary. It is used only in the mercantile sense. The successful man is the man with a large bank account, no matter whether that bank account was gained by tricks or by fraud. There he stands; and American youth are being taught to look to him as their ideal. To gain this golden prize—men all around us are sacrificing their nobler, their better selves, are giving up love and home and leisure, are overtaxing their brains and laying perhaps the seed for future insanity, never dreaming that after all it is only a base slavery. But the true success is when the man is master of himself; when he will do the right, as God helps him to see the right, though all men be against him; when he can see those around him growing richer and stronger every year without envy and without bitterness; when he can die at last thanking

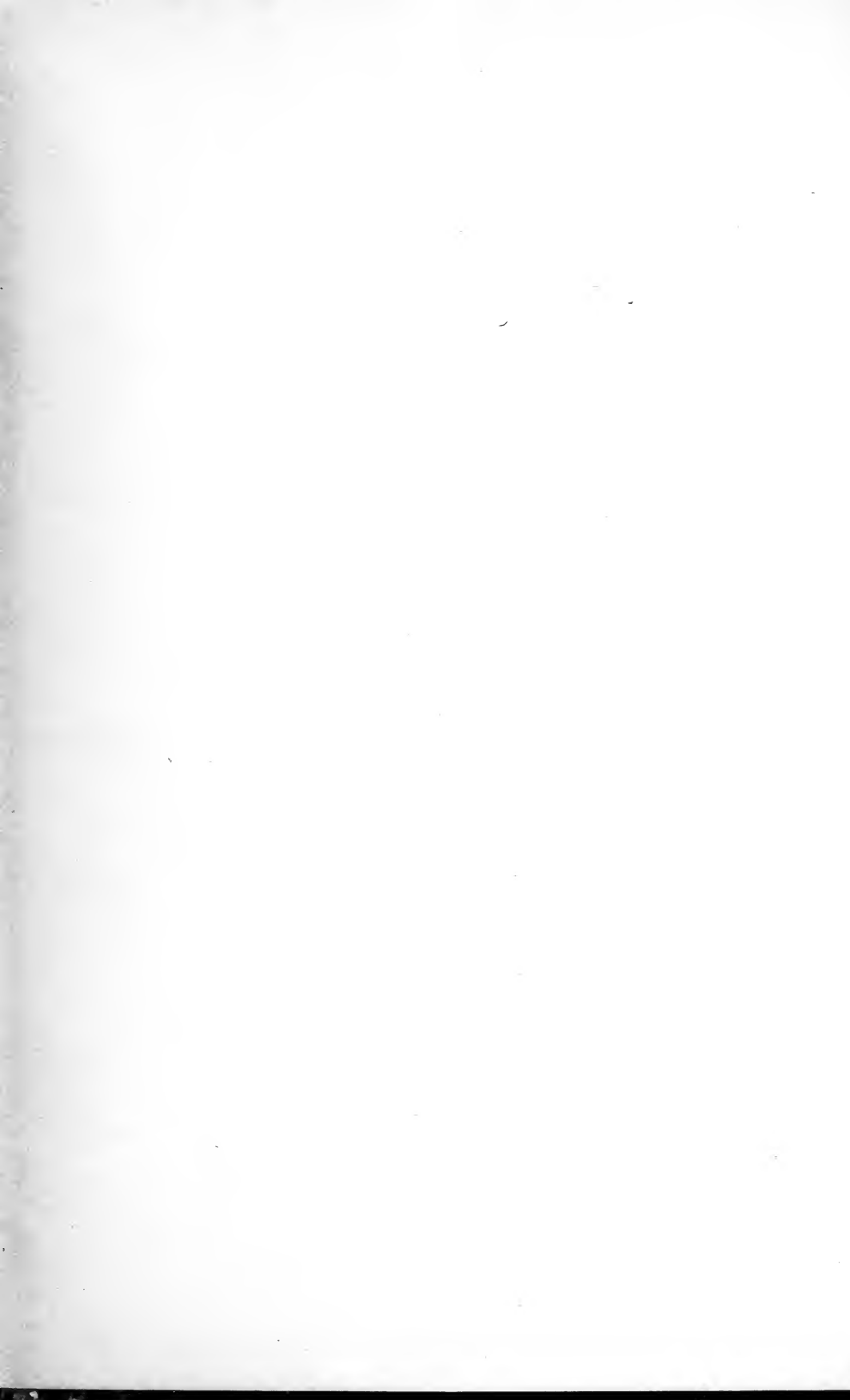
God that he has never grown rich by crushing out the pity and the love in his heart, or influential by tampering with the truth of God. It is an old man with a worn coat and a small income but an honest heart who stands before me to-day, as I speak to you, as the truest example of success.

I once stood before the picture of the crucifixion by Verestchagin. At first I was shocked, it seemed to me to go against all the principles of Christian art through all the ages, but at last a nobler thought dawned on my mind. In the picture it is only a Hebrew peasant dying on a cross. There is no attempt to idealize with beauty the head that was crowned with thorns. In the crowd are the richly dressed, the nobles and the priests, here and there amongst the rabble. Well, be it so. Take, if you will, away from the Man of Sorrows that divine look of beauty and of love which Fra Angelico and Guido and Raphael and all the greatest painters of antiquity have painted there. Try to sink, if you will, the greatest event of all history down to the level of a modern execution, yet you will, nevertheless, only have made the miracle of history the greater, for Jesus has conquered without any of the world's means of success. And has He not conquered? Judging even by a picture so barren of religious imagination as this, has He not succeeded in the truest sense of the word? To be sure the high priests are there gloating over their Victim and every one of the world's historians would pronounce the word "defeat." The head that might have been crowned with gold is crowned with thorns; the hands that might have grasped the scepter of the Cæsars are nailed to the cross. And yet, forget the world and look once more at Calvary, and do you not see that by the standard of God the success is divine? For He alone has

conquered; He alone has been true to his manhood; He has been the Son of God even unto the end. "It is finished," He can say, "Father into thy hands I commend My spirit." Those two high priests in their rich dresses go back to their marble palaces and congratulate themselves over the event of that day. Pilate's sympathy has been held in check, the people have been kept amused and interested and He, that Jesus, the defier of their power, the disturber of their temple, is dead. Ah, which is your ideal of success? Money, power, influence, social prestige all on the side of the Sanhedrin, but truth, holiness, righteousness, manhood, all on the side of Christ. Which is the successful life? It is with this thought that I would send you young men out to face the trials and troubles of life. I would that every man who graduates from an American college or an American university might have learned, whatever else he learned—might have learned the spirit of independence. Then you would go out to be true nobles, knights to fight in the cause of truth and love. And, as you leave this building to-day, may you hear above all the din and roar of the world outside, coming down through the ages from that Man Who died upon the cross of Calvary these words: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." "Who-soever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple."

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